

two altars before which he never omitted to bow in passing. Children's services are specially adapted to their understanding (or are meant to be) and it would be as well if children attended these services only.

The hall-mark of religion is character: "by their fruits ye shall know them." If religion fails to control the life of an individual, that religion is vain. If we are to lead children we must be prepared to live what we teach. To tell a child one thing and do another, is to make God of no account. I am convinced that silent influence is infinitely more potent than any speech. What we wish the children under our care to become that we must be ourselves. Do we wish them to speak gently we must ourselves speak gently to them, do we wish their ideals to be high we must ever be holding a high standard of conduct before them, in order that they may form their judgment from what they see and know. We must steer clear of the notion that religion is for Sunday and church, it is for every day, every hour; the atmosphere of each home reflects the religion of that house, and it is well for those children who find in their own homes a faint reflection of "the peace of God which passeth man's understanding."

Confronted with such reflections it is small wonder if women consider: Are they "religious enough" to be mothers? Moreover, have men and women passed from the barrier of sects into the breadth of the beyond, where there is neither 'my' view nor 'your,' view, but God's way only. I hold they have no right to emphasize doctrinal views when teaching children; failing to believe themselves, there could be no sincerity in such lessons. I would have children taught to respect every man's faith—even the worship by a savage of his fetich. After all, it is the spirit of reverence, not the thing revered that uplifts the soul in its devotion, just as with love, it is the love given—not the creature loved—that purifies and raises human nature. Let religion for children—as for men and women—be the daily round, the common task, and let the consistency of our lives be to them the outward visible sign of the in-dwelling love of God.

## THE ART OF SINGING.

BY MADAME FEININGER OF BERLIN.

SOME years ago, men of science gave much attention to investigating the cause of the dearth of great singers, for the latter half of the nineteenth century seemed to be bringing forth hardly any worthy of a place in the ranks of those who had been the acknowledged "Queens of Song." The conclusions arrived at were that the breathing technique was faulty, and that physical culture in its broadest sense was lacking. To these, we of the present time might add that many habits of living in this neurotic age are detrimental to the production of great voices; healthful nerves are requisite for tuneful resonance and enduring vocal powers.

Again, a fruitful source of the production of mediocre singers, *i.e.*, of those whose standard is just a mark below the "good," has been, and is too often still, the mediocre teaching which has abounded to a great degree. There has been until late years a woeful lack of knowledge of the most elementary principles of good singing, and of the good teaching of it among the general public, and thus many a promising and beautiful voice has been ruined in the early training. But nowadays, everyone hears more or less of "method and voice production," and the difficulty of the moment is to be sure that a "method" is not only artistic, but *physiologically sound*, and one which will not only strengthen, but beautify that most precious gift—a sweet and musical voice. In matters musical, as well as in the other realms of art, and those of science, progress is the note of the age in which we live. Precision and mechanical force *alone* will no longer suffice for the interpretation of the classical, still less for the modern, music. While the works of the old masters are often of a more or less concrete form, and their intrinsic charms of melody will make them things of beauty for all time, the modern music has been written by those who, striving to free themselves from the fetters of convention,



have long since exhausted mere form, and demand that the interpretation of their works shall take its colouring directly through mental transmittance. Hence technique is no longer an end but a means.

The aim of every student of singing should be the acquirement of a well-trained voice; that is, he is to seek to improve his talent of a singing voice by the use of true method in training it. The two most essential features of voice-culture are those known as "vocal poise," and "diction." "Poise," in its ordinary sense, means equilibrium or "balance," in other words the distribution of the weight of a body over such parts as were meant to carry it. We all know how necessary the right "poise" is for the dancer and the acrobat, who without it would be in continual bodily danger; the painter and the sculptor too must find the right poise for their figures, otherwise these would lack life and grace and vigour. When we speak of "vocal poise," we mean such a combination of muscular breath control and tone-placement as shall result in the *distribution of the tone rays of the voice over such parts as were designed to receive them*. Consequently the aim of the student of singing should be from the very outset, a right combination of these two factors of voice-training, *i.e.*, of right balancing + right placement.

Now "balance" is mainly a question of muscle-training, and in singing, such exercises (by no means all vocal ones) should be chosen as will loosen and strengthen the poise, *i.e.*, muscles connected with the emission and control of the breath. Stiffness is the enemy of art, and nullifies all efforts to attain the beautiful; but when the muscles are so trained that the maintaining of the right "vocal poise" becomes a matter of habit, then, and not till then, should the student pass on to the study of the intricacies and refinements of his art.

We shall see better the necessity for this training of special muscles connected with the voice—either for its emission or control—if we think of the human body as like that of a 'cello—the vocal chords as the strings, and the spiral of air (*i.e.*, the breath), which plays upon those strings at the will of the performer, as the bow. Now we all know that no tones of real beauty could be produced on a 'cello, either with relaxed

strings or on an instrument the body of which was made of unseasoned material. It is in this latter point that we should specially note the analogy between the two. If the 'cello is made of unseasoned wood many of the fibres lack the power of vibration, and it is just this unresponsiveness of some of the fibres, that makes it impossible for even a master's hand to draw from such an instrument the tones of rounded fulness and beauty, which could be evoked from one mellowed by age and use.

In like manner, if the special muscles of the human frame connected with the voice are flabby and unbraced, the singing tones will lack roundness and power. The question of right breathing is a very necessary one, but this other matter of *correct distribution and support of the weight of the voice*, is of equal importance. It takes only little breath to set the vocal chords in motion, but the elasticity of these most sensitive organs may be easily injured if too much breath is allowed to work upwards. The breath must be kept under perfect muscular control, and side by side with this must come the study of *tone-placement*, both of these being questions of correct *vocal poise*.

Next will come the study of *diction* or *word-placement*, with all its subtleties of romance or colouring. The Italian language, soft as it is for singing owing to its richness of vowel sounds, requires distinct enunciation. When Caruso sings "La donna é mobile," one can literally *pick up* the words, so freely do they travel across the auditorium. This absolute command of diction is called "verve," and is acquired only by conscientious and continued study. In whatever language we sing, whether in the rounded liquid Italian, or the more vigorous, because more consonantal, tongues of the north, the diction must be thoroughly studied, and here we see the reasonableness of having previously acquired habitually correct *tone-placement*. A singer's attention should not have to be diverted from diction to poise, because directly his attention wanders from diction (which of course includes expression and colour) the words are apt to slip back, and the *tone follows them*.

When the tones have emerged from the pharynx as the starting point, the tone-rays diffuse themselves according



to requirement in various directions, always forward, but upwards into the nasal cavities for "fioratura" and lightly tripping melodies, and with a more downward direction for warm or sombre tones. The *general* tone-seat never varies no matter whether the tone-rays are passing upwards, forwards, or downwards, *i.e.*, it is always in the upper-forward portion of the mouth. "*Not to sing on words, but to speak on tones,*" is an excellent rule for the study of diction in singing. Then when the student has learnt the fundamental principles of (a) poise (*i.e.*, breathing and tone-placement), (b) the technique of diction (*i.e.*, the producing of the consonants with tongue, teeth, and lips, and the position of the mouth in order to form the vowel sounds rightly), his studies for (c) long sustained tones and flexibility may begin.

It is not advisable that he should meanwhile be kept only to dry exercises, but be given songs upon a small range of the middle voice, as a means of exercising the diction with correct tone-production and with such a degree of correct diaphragmatical breathing as has been already acquired. The texts of the song must be read aloud, and the inflection necessary to their true interpretation found; and this will lead the student gradually to put aside as unworthy, insipid texts into which he can put no meaning, or very little, for he will gradually begin to realise that the singer is meant to fulfil his mission as one who fills up a "want" by completing the triad of musician, poet, and interpreter.

The object of this paper (which is really a plea for reform in voice-culture) is to aid young students to find out for themselves in what voice-training really consists; they will then know what to aim at in their studies. All singing, or teaching of singing, outside these fundamental principles is but naturalism, which, if persevered in, confirms the faults from which no voice is quite exempt. These faults may often be unrecognisable to the general public so long as the first freshness of a voice remains, but if they are persevered in, they lead surely and steadily to that point where one realises, only too late, that money, hopes, and often health, have been wasted, and that what might have been the possession and joy of a life-time has been irretrievably lost.

## NOTES OF LESSONS.

[We have thought that it might be of use to our readers (in families and schools) to publish occasionally Notes of Lessons prepared by students of the House of Education for the pupils of the Practising School. We should like to say, however, that such a Lesson is never given as a *tour de force*, but is always an illustration or an expansion of some part of the children's regular studies (in the *Parents' Review* School), of some passage in one or other of their school books.—ED.]

### I.

*Subject: Natural History.*

Group: Science.

Class IA.

Time: 15 minutes

BY H. SMEETON.

### OBJECTS.

- I. To arouse interest in one of our less conspicuous trees.
- II. To stimulate future observation.
- III. To show that everything in nature has its use and lives to fulfil it.

### LESSON.

*Step I.*—Name three forest trees and say how an ivy tree differs from them all.

In what kind of places do we find ivy?

*Step II.*—The ivy does not bear fruit and flowers until it has spent some years climbing.

The flower does not come until late autumn when nearly every other flower has gone, and thus coming late the honey in the flower prolongs the life of myriads of insects. The ivy berries in early spring supply food for blackbirds, thrushes, and wood pigeons.

*Step III.*—Some of the insects that visit the ivy flowers:—

*Hive and humble bees* gather honey to carry to their homes.

*Wasps* collect honey and take it home for their grubs which they feed six to eight times a day.